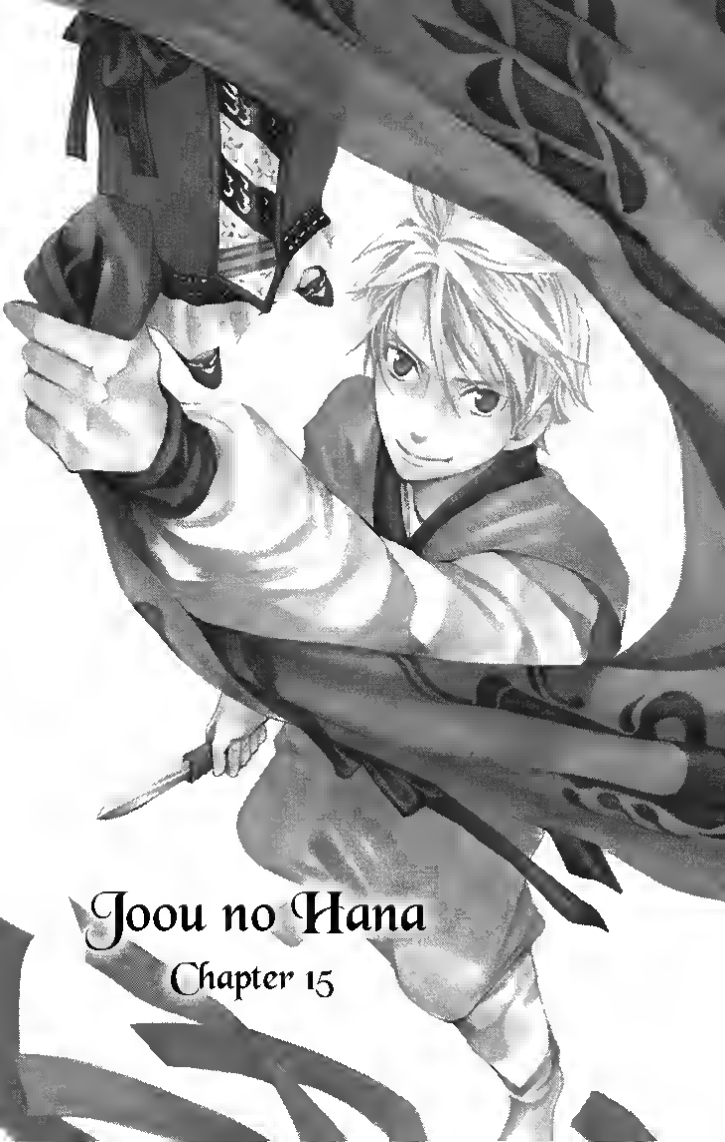


Joou no Hana

Chapter 15

One month after the demise of King Ah.

HAS KING AH TRULY PASSED?!
WHAT OF DO AND SOU'S ADVANCEMENTS?!
WE MUST TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO COLLECT FROM AH WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY OURS!

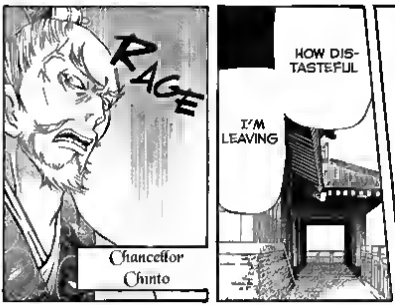
HOLD. HOLD ON! WE STILL HAVE AKI-SAMA.
WE MUST INSTATE AKI-SAMA AS THE NEXT RULER OF AH!
WHAT UTTER NON-SENSE!
DO YOU THINK AH WILL JUST STAND BY IDLY? THEY HAVE A PRINCE!
WE'D BE INITIATING ANOTHER WAR.

AKI-SAMA,
WHAT DO YOU THINK?!

Blink
PARDON?
Well? Speak up!
AND TO THEN PRESSURE IT FOR AN ANSWER WHEN IT CAN'T DECIDE...!
Mehh~
WHAT DO YOU THINK MY THOUGHTS ON THIS MATTER ARE?! YOU'RE MERELY THINKING OF WAYS TO USE ME NEXT.
IT IS LIKE ASKING A LAMB WHETHER IT PREFERS TO BE BOILED OR GRILLED!!
AKI-SAMA.

How unpleasant.
Smile

Ahem.
YOUR THOUGHTS, AKI-SAMA. .?
.....


RAGE
Chancellor Chinto
HOW DIS-TASTEFUL
I'M LEAVING

SEIITSU!
HOW IN THE WORLD IS THAT PRINCESS SO CHEEKY? SHE'S REALLY TAKING HER LEAVE JUST LIKE THAT?! WHAT A FOOL!
AH, YES
SUCH INSOLENCE!
SHE'S STILL
ABOUT A THOUSAND TIMES BETTER THAN A GEEZER LIKE YOU.
CHAN-CELLOR
NEVER-THELESS, SHE'S AN UNSIGHTLY CHILD. I VERY MUCH DISLIKE HER.
IS THAT SO? SHE IS REPUTED TO TAKE AFTER QUEEN KOU IN BEAUTY, THOUGH...
SHE'S OF UGLY CHARACTER!
I AM WELL AWARE.
KOU WILL STAND TO BENEFIT GREATLY IN THE AFTER-MATH.
EVEN STILL, AKI-SAMA HAS A RIGHT TO AH'S THRONE, WHICH MAKES HER AN INDISPENSABLE PERSON WHO COULD CHANGE THE WORLD

THOUGH KING AH HAS PERISHED, SHE DOES NOT SHOW SADNESS, LET ALONE SHED ANY TEARS.
WHAT AN EXTREME LACK OF DUTIFULNESS.
YOU'RE OUT EARLY. HAS THE MEETING FINISHED ALREADY?
PRIN CESS!
AHA HA.
THEY'VE PROBABLY LOST THEIR COMPOSURE BY NOW AND ARE CURSING ME OUT.
IT WAS FUTILE.
TAP
TAP

WHEN SLANDERING OTHERS.
ONE'S TRUE NATURE COMES TO THE FORE-FRONT..
HOW FRIGHTFUL
EVERY-ONE IS AT A LOSS AS TO WHAT AKI-SAMA SHOULD DO
TO USE YOU WOULD BE TO PURSUE A DANGEROUS JEWEL, THOUGH THEY DO NOT WANT TO RISK LOSING SAID JEWEL ALTO-GETHER
Scratch
Scratch
SEITSU,
WHAT HAPPENED?

THUS, IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT YOU ARE TO LEAVE THE CAPITAL FOR THE EASTERN CASTLE.
IS THE PRINCESS TO BE CONFINED?
I WILL NEED TIME TO GET KOU'S MOST INFLUENTIAL HIGH STEWARD ON MY SIDE
Clench
THE DAY I RETURN TO AH, I CAN'T ALLOW MYSELF EVEN THE SMALLEST CHANCE OF FAILURE.
IT WOULD BE TROUBLING TO CRAWL MY WAY TO AH LACKING RELIABLE SUPPORT
I UNDER-STAND
THOUGH YOU MUST WANT TO RETURN TO AH AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, IT IS STILL NOT ..

I WILL KILL QUEEN DO!

I'll kill her.

It's quite possible that that woman holds his life in her hands.

I haven't been able to confirm Seitetsu's safety either.

That woman, who is corrupting my homeland.

She murdered my mother, perhaps even my Royal Father.

So she conceals that much passion under her cool exterior

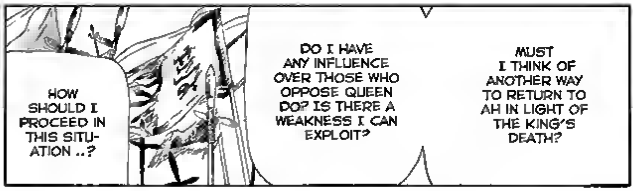
I SHALL USE MY INFLUENCE TO ENSURE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THE CAPITAL AT AN EARLIER DATE
Haha!
SUCH DOUBT
YOU CAN DO THAT?

SUPPORTS YOU FROM UNDER-GROUND.
life
MY BRO-THER
I SHALL ASCEND THE RANKS UNTIL I AM DEEMED THIS COUNTRY'S MOST NOTABLE PREMIER.
HENCE, I SHALL SUPPORT YOU FROM THE HEAVENS.

IF HE IS YOUR SWORD,
I SHALL BE THE WIND THAT SUPPORTS YOU.
THANK YOU.
Thank God for letting me meet these men.
And...

For having someone by my side, always within reach.
PRINCESS
YOU MUST GET READY IF YOU ARE TO LEAVE THE CAPITAL.
YES, ALSO. .
THOUGH IT IS BELATED,
MY DEEPEST CONDOLENCES FOR YOUR LOSS.
IS IT STRANGE THAT I DON'T FEEL AN OUNCE OF SADNESS OVER MY ROYAL FATHER'S DEATH?

I FEEL NOTHING AT ALL.

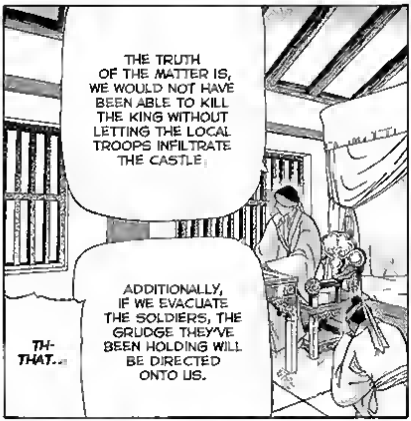

HOW SHOULD I PROCEED IN THIS SITU-ATION ..?
DO I HAVE ANY INFLUENCE OVER THOSE WHO OPPOSE QUEEN DO? IS THERE A WEAKNESS I CAN EXPLOIT?
MUST I THINK OF ANOTHER WAY TO RETURN TO AH IN LIGHT OF THE KING'S DEATH?

OF COURSE, NEITHER DOES QUEEN DO, WHO KILLED HIM HER-SELF.
HOW-EVER—

I DESPISED MY ROYAL FATHER AND HIS HEARTLESS DEMEANOR.
HE MAY HAVE MADE A SPLENDID RULER, BUT HE SHOWED NOT ONE TRACE OF AFFECTION..

PRIN-CESS?

I WONDER,
AM I NOT OF THE SAME KIND?
...
Ah
KYAHAHAHA!
QUEEN DO-SAMA,
THE LOCAL TROOPS ARE CAUSING MIS-CONDUCT IN THE COURT ONCE MORE


THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS, WE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO KILL THE KING WITHOUT LETTING THE LOCAL TROOPS INFILTRATE THE CASTLE.
ADDITIONALLY, IF WE EVACUATE THE SOLDIERS, THE GRUDGE THEY'VE BEEN HOLDING WILL BE DIRECTED ONTO US.
TH-THAT...

LEAVE THEM BE.

"She-devil!"

WHAT'S WRONG?
IS KILLING THE KING NOT A FEAT TO BE PRAISED?

"Pathetic woman."

"Could it be that you wanted my love...?"

YOU, DYING A MISERABLE DEATH, HAVING BEEN BETRAYED BY YOUR PRINCESS AND VASSALS, IS FAR MORE PATHETIC.
I'M PATHETIC?

I don't know.

WE WOULD BE INDEBTED IF YOU WOULD EXIT YOUR QUARTERS AND LOOK AT POLICY..
KOUHU..

THOUGH YOUR WOUND HAS NOT YET HEALED,

AM I BEAUTIFUL...?

Snicker
TURN
IS THAT SO? SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT I'M BEAUTIFUL

C.. CERTAINLY/ YOU ARE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD
CAN A FACE, SHAMEFULLY DISTORTED BY THE LOSS OF AN EYE STILL BE BEAUTIFUL?
OF COURSE IT CAN/

YOU'RE AN UGLY MAN.

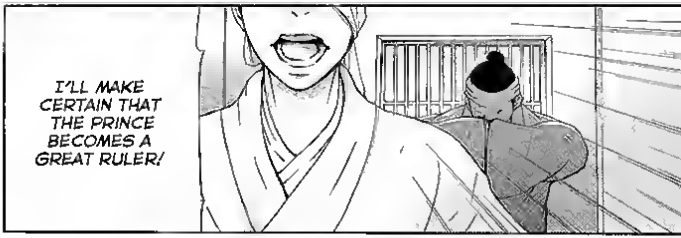
A MAN WHO IS AS FOND OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN AS HE IS AFRAID OF THEM.
AN *EXTREMELY* UGLY MAN. THERE ISN'T A SINGLE FEMALE WHO COULD POSSIBLY FANCY SOMEONE LIKE YOU,

BUT THAT'S FINE.
YOU MUST NOT LIKE ME VERY MUCH,
Rise
BEAUTY IS A POWERFUL THING.
MEN HATE STRONG, POWERFUL WOMEN, UGLY MEN ALL THE MORE

I NO LONGER DESIRE TO BE BEAUT-IFUL.
I DON'T EVEN DESIRE TO BE A WOMAN.
YOU'RE A BRUTE, WHO BETRAYED THE KING.
A CHILD THAT CAN'T BE TRUSTED,
WITH A MIND AND BODY SOAKED IN UNPAR ALLELED SHAME.
THEREFORE, I AM SURE WE CAN JOIN FORCES AND BENEFIT MUTUALLY.
WOULDN'T IT MAKE A TRULY GENUINE RELATIONSHIP? NO TIME WILL HAVE TO BE WASTED ON MATTERS SUCH AS LOYALTY AND HONOR
HA HA HA
EVEN IF. .

WITH DO AS OUR GREATEST ALLY.
EVEN IF I WERE TO BE CRITICIZED AS A REBELLIOUS SUBJECT, AS AH'S PREMIER, I CANNOT ALLOW THIS COUNTRY TO GO UNDER.
THAT IS A GIVEN.
CREAK
IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE PRINCE TO BECOME AH'S KING.

CALL ME A MONSTER IF YOU'D LIKE.
IF YOU WISH TO CALL ME AN EVIL HAG, DO AS YOU WILL.
I LIVE BY MY OWN MORALITY.


I'LL MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE PRINCE BECOMES A GREAT RULER!

Will this
QUEEN DO HAS UNDERGONE TREMENDOUS CHANGE
STEP

Be this country's blessing—or curse?
ONCE THE FUNERAL IS CONCLUDED, THE PRINCE SHALL ASCEND TO THE THRONE.
SEE TO IT THAT THE PALACE IS FULLY RESTORED BY THEN!
AND WE SIMPLY BORROWED DO'S STRENGTH TO SUPPRESS THE REBELLION
UNDER-STOOD?
Wahaha
YES!
THE KING PERISHED IN A FIGHT WITH THAT SPY FROM KOU,
YES!
TELL THEM THAT HE WAS ASSASSINATED.
IF ANYONE TRIES TO DIG DEEPER INTO THE CAUSE OF THE KING'S PASSING

WILL WE BECOME SO INDEBTED TO DO THAT THIS COUNTRY ENDS UP COLLAPSING...?
IF THIS CONTINUES,
I CANNOT FATHOM JUST HOW MUCH MONEY AND LABOR WE WILL NEED...
That princess was only fourteen when I last saw her. She was surprisingly intelligent, but...
IS THERE ANY WAY WE CAN CHOOSE THE PRINCESS INSTEAD OF THE PRINCE...?
NO, HAVING A FEMALE RULER IS UNHEARD OF!

THOUGH WE WERE TO GATHER ALL THE ITEMS NECESSARY FOR THE CORONATION,
THERE IS SOMETHING I MUST BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION...
QUEEN DO-SAMA.
THE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECT IS MISSING!
Shimmer

Illustrated by KANEYOSHI IZUMI

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Joou no Hana
Volume 06
Chapter 15
Part A

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